



Morning Alert - Wednesday, May 31, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

NHK led with a report on North Korea's ballistic missile launch on Monday. TV Asahi reported that the U.S. successfully conducted its first ICBM intercept test. Other top news included a report that the temperature topped 30 degrees Celsius in many places in Japan yesterday and a report on a bus accident in Osaka in which eight kindergarten pupils were injured.

Yomiuri and Asahi gave top coverage to reports on the GOJ's apparent failure to achieve its goal of eliminating waiting lists for daycare centers by the end of the fiscal year. Other major front-page items include the likely passage at the Lower House next week of a bill on the Emperor's abdication.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe, Moon confirm need to apply more pressure on North Korea

All papers reported that Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Moon spoke over the phone on Tuesday and affirmed the need to increase pressure on the DPRK following its ballistic missile launch on Monday. In response to the premier's remarks emphasizing the need to ratchet up the pressure on Pyongyang, the ROK leader reportedly shared the prime minister's concern that North Korea's repeated provocations constitute a threat to Japan. Moon also thanked Abe for his leadership at the recent G7 Taormina Summit in asking other leaders to tighten the noose on the Kim regime.

In related stories, Nikkei and Mainichi wrote that Abe is likely to dispatch LDP Secretary General Nikai to Seoul as his emissary in the near future to head off possible friction with the Moon administration over the bilateral comfort women agreement.

Japan, China agree to strengthen coordination of policies on DPRK

All dailies took up a meeting held yesterday in Tokyo between Foreign Minister Kishida and China's State Councilor Yang Jiechi, at which the two officials agreed to take a concerted approach to curbing additional provocations by North Korea. In response to Kishida's calls for Beijing to use its influence on North Korea, the top Chinese official in charge of foreign policy stressed the importance of dialogue to defuse the tension. Kishida asked Yang not to allow Chinese government ships to intrude in Japan's territorial waters around the Senkakus. He also urged the swift release of six Japanese citizens who have been detained in China since March on suspicion of espionage. The two officials also agreed to improve bilateral ties with the goal of arranging a summit between Prime Minister Abe and Chinese President Xi in Germany in July and convening a trilateral summit with South Korea in Tokyo later this year. Yang is expected to hold talks with Abe today.

Abe receives courtesy call from U.S. congressional delegation

Yomiuri and Nikkei reported that Prime Minister Abe met with a group of American politicians led by House Armed Services Committee Chairman Thornberry, and confirmed mutual cooperation in dealing with North Korea. In response to Abe's remarks urging North Korea to take concrete actions toward denuclearization, Thornberry stressed that Washington shares Tokyo's concerns about regional security. They also agreed on the steady implementation of the present Futenma relocation plan.

UN special rapporteur mentions GOJ's "pressure on media"

Most papers reported that the UNHCR posted on its website on Monday a preliminary report on free speech in Japan drafted by David Kaye, the U.N. special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. While referring to "direct and indirect pressure" on the media by the Japanese government, the UN report called for the elimination of a provision in the Broadcast Act that stipulates "political impartiality" on the grounds that it undermines broadcasters' freedom and independence. The UN official cited Communications Minister Takaichi's repeated remarks suggesting the possibility of revoking the license of a broadcaster if it continues to air programs which the government considers to be politically biased. The UNHCR concurrently released a GOJ document dismissing Kaye's assertion. The UN official is expected to provide a briefing on his findings at a UN Human Rights Council meeting on June 12.

India takes issue with price of Japanese defense aircraft

Sankei front-paged a report saying that the Indian government has been losing interest in purchasing MSDF US-2 amphibious aircraft designed for air-sea rescue operations on the grounds that the suggested price is too high. Noting that the proposed sale was expected to become the first

major defense hardware transfer deal with a foreign partner under the revised arms export principles, the daily projected that it might not work out after all.

U.S. scribe sacked for derogatory tweet about Japanese race car driver

Asahi, Nikkei, and Sankei wrote in their city news sections that a Denver Post sportswriter was fired on account of a comment he posted on Twitter expressing displeasure with the victory of Japanese driver Takuma Sato in the recent Indianapolis 500. The journalist said in the tweet: "I am very uncomfortable with a Japanese driver winning the Indianapolis 500 during Memorial Day weekend." Although the reporter later apologized, the Denver Post decided to cut ties with him by saying that the tweet was "disrespectful and unacceptable."

SECURITY

MSDF ships to conduct joint training with USS Ronald Reagan

Asahi said the MSDF and the U.S. Navy are making arrangements to carry out a joint drill involving Japanese warships and the USS Ronald Reagan in the near future before the nuclear flattop heads to the Sea of Japan sometime in June. The training is intended to demonstrate strong bilateral naval defense coordination with the goal of holding the DPRK in check

Okinawa to sue central government to seek suspension of Henoko work

Tuesday evening's Asahi, Mainichi, and Tokyo Shimbun reported that Okinawa Governor Onaga is likely to file a lawsuit in July at the earliest seeking a court stay regarding the ongoing landfill work for FRF construction off Camp Schwab. The prefectural government will submit to the prefectural assembly next month a motion seeking the legislature's endorsement of the legal action, and the assembly is expected to give the green light.

U.S. military calls off parachute drop training

Mainichi reported briefly that the U.S. military decided yesterday not to carry out offshore parachute drop training scheduled for two days starting today in Uruma, Okinawa. According to the daily, the GOJ had asked the U.S. side not to go ahead with the drill on the grounds that it failed to give notice at least seven days in advance in accordance with standard practice.

Over 60% of Iwakuni assembly members approve of relocation of carrier-borne wing

Yomiuri reported that 20 of the 32 Iwakuni City assembly members have voiced their support for the planned relocation of a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier squadron from NAF Atsugi to MCAS Iwakuni. As Mayor Fukuda has said that he would approve the plan pending the legislature's approval, the daily projected that the municipal leader will announce his endorsement in the near future.

ECONOMY

More hiccups expected in Toshiba's plan to deconsolidate semiconductor division

Most papers reported that top officials of the Innovation Network Corp of Japan (INCJ) have not been able to reach an official internal consensus on joining hands with U.S. equity fund KKR to purchase Toshiba Memory due to Western Digital's continued opposition to Toshiba's plan to spin off the semiconductor operation. While Western Digital may choose to give up on its own bid and instead team up with KKR, INCJ, and the Development Bank of Japan to purchase the division, the U.S. semiconductor manufacturer's strong insistence on a sizable stake in Toshiba Memory may make the potential partnership difficult.

GOJ to assign more bureaucrats to TPP team for swift effectuation

Mainichi reported on a GOJ plan to increase the number of staff at the Cabinet Office working on the TPP, noting that two dozen additional officials will join the present 17-member team by July with the goal of exercising Japan's leadership to effectuate the free trade initiative quickly without U.S. participation. Prime Minister Abe instructed relevant cabinet ministers yesterday to do their utmost to put the TPP into effect at an early date by saying that the prospects for free trade depend on the success of the regional trade accord. Yomiuri ran a similar story.

